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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004829

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA DISENGAGEMENT: ISRAELI CABINET SET TO VOTE

AUGUST 7 ON SETTLEMENT EVACUATION LOGISTICS

REF: TEL AVIV 4694

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Cabinet is scheduled to vote August 7 on the evacuation of at least one of the four groups of settlements slated to be evacuated beginning August 17 pursuant to Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan. The vote will take place at the end of a week during which tens of thousands of disengagement opponents demonstrated against the withdrawal plan along the Israel-Gaza border, requiring the deployment of thousands of police and border guards to block their entry into the Gaza Strip. Anti-disengagement groups plan more demonstrations next week. While a June 6, 2004 Cabinet decision requires the Cabinet to approve each of the four phases of evacuation before the next phase is implemented, it is likely that the Cabinet will approve several of the four phases of evacuation before disengagement begins August 17. There is currently a clear majority of 15-16 of the 22 ministers -- buttressed by Labor Party ministers' support -- to pass all of the phases (see reftel). The political story behind the Cabinet's evacuation vote is whether Sharon's rival, Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, will vote against the evacuation to further set himself up as Likud's more right-wing alternative to Sharon. END SUMMARY.

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Details of Cabinet Vote Unclear  
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2. (C) Aharon Lishanksy, Office of the Cabinet Secretary, told Poloff August 4 that the August 7 Cabinet session agenda lists only one item: evacuation of settlements according to the disengagement plan. Lishanksy stressed that the action agenda may only be decided upon August 7. Vice Premier Shimon Peres' Deputy Director General for Administration Yona Bartal told Poloff August 4 that the Cabinet vote will likely be on just one group of settlements. Ministry of Justice Knesset Liaison Paz Barnett told poloff August 4 that the IDF and police will present evacuation implementation plans to the Cabinet and that only then will the Cabinet decide on how to proceed with the evacuation. Barnett said that it is still unclear which combination of settlement groups the Cabinet will vote to evacuate or if it will vote on all four phases together at the upcoming Sunday session. According to the Israeli media, the Cabinet will vote August 7 to evacuate three isolated settlements in Gaza: Netzarim, Kfar Dorom, and Morag. The Cabinet could then decide in the following weeks on the next groups, but may not decide in which order those settlements will be evacuated until close to the August 17 commencement date.

3. (C) The IDF reportedly is trying to maintain secrecy as to the order in which the settlements will be evacuated. Director of Strategic Coordination Staff in the Prime Minister's Office BG (res.) Eval Giladi said in an August 4 radio interview that the IDF should have flexibility during the withdrawal and that settlers who want to leave should be allowed to leave. He noted, however, that he is "not sure if would make sense to say on the radio what the plan is."

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Cabinet Majority Assured  
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4. (C) Sharon is assured that at least 15-16 of the Cabinet ministers will support whatever combination of phased evacuation is proposed or an advance execution of the entire plan in one "continuous phase." Several of the more right-wing Likud ministers, and those who have opposed disengagement from the beginning, are likely to vote against any evacuation at the August 7 session, such as Likud ministers Binyamin Netanyahu, Yisrael Katz, Danny Naveh, Limor Livnat, and possibly Tzachi Hanegbi. Naveh reportedly may vote in favor of evacuating the first group of settlements in exchange for Cabinet approval of building a new neighborhood in E-1, near Ma'ale Adumim (septel). While Netanyahu voted with the majority in approving the phased disengagement plan in June 2004, he will likely use any deviation from that June 2004 decision to vote against the evacuations on August 7. Barnett noted that "inside politics" will be motivating Netanyahu. Netanyahu can argue that the evacuation needs to be postponed until more of the logistical details have been resolved, such as where to house the evacuated settlers.

15. (C) The Cabinet vote on Sunday precedes the Cabinet's August 9 consideration of the controversial 2006 budget, to be presented by Netanyahu. Peres assistant Bartal said that the Labor Party will meet before August 9 to discuss the budget, and that the Labor ministers are likely to vote against it.

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